

Phillip Robinson Examines the



Damask Perpetuals

As with most other classes of roses, the Damask Perpetuals are a poorly defined group. This is especially true today. Some prominent cataloguers of old roses include many roses that clearly show affinity with other groups and divergence from the roses that William Paul described as “Damask Roses blooming in the autumn; they ought to possess the spines and leaves of the Damask,



PREVIOUS PAGE AND LEFT: Duchesse de Rohan.
Photo by Phillip Robinson.
ABOVE: Rose du Roi. Photo by Ron Robertson.
OPPOSITE: Rose du Roi (of Commerce).
Photo by Gregg Lowery.

by which they can be distinguished from other perpetuals.” The term Damask Perpetual is most correct since none of the contemporaneous authors use Portland as a class name. Although an important parent and early member of the group, the Portland Rose, by whichever synonym is chosen, was not the only, or earliest, progenitor of the class.

My observations over a number of



years have shown that a small group of roses still extant can be considered true Damask Perpetuals. These roses do not show any clear sign of any influence from the China-Tea complex of roses that so changed the rose world of Europe in the early 19th century. This is in direct conflict with most modern explanations of the origins of the class. It is claimed that some red China was involved with the development, for example, of the Portland Rose. This rose shows no sign of any China-like leaf smoothness, scent, or petalage. The Autumn Damasks and Gallias seem to be the only influences. All roses that I call my core group of Damask Perpetuals exhibit little or no China rose influence.

It is inevitable that some, especially the later varieties, would show some small hint of China inheritance. No class of roses is totally isolated; they intergrade into each other. As the new Hybrid Perpetual class of roses was being developed, varieties were developed that showed clear affinities to their immediate ancestors,

the Damask Perpetuals. One example mentioned in the literature is the progeny of ATHALIN, which resulted from crosses with ROSE DU ROI; these were of Portland character and recurrent. ATHALIN was a nonrecurrent Hybrid Bourbon rose, which was an important parent of the original Hybrid Perpetuals. ROSE DU ROI was possibly the most important of the Damask Perpetuals. Affinities to the Damask Perpetuals were also shown by the Trianon roses of Pierre Vibert, but they show clear influence from the China roses. These roses, the descendants of ATHALIN, ROSE DU ROI, TRIANON, and others, were classed variously by different authors as Damask Perpetuals or Hybrid Perpetuals in the first years after their introduction. As the Damask Perpetuals were eclipsed by the Hybrid Perpetuals, these roses were then catalogued with the class in which they truly belong due to their strong inheritance from the China roses through their other parents: the Bourbons, Hybrid Bourbons, and Hybrid Chinas.

First let us discuss those roses that clearly form a group that can be considered currently available representatives of the Damask Perpetual class. The Autumn Damask, old but of indeterminate age, can be grouped here as an important progenitor, though it differs in many characteristics. Already mentioned is the Portland Rose from around 1770, which was important in the development of the class. From this was bred the very important but very elusive ROSE DU ROI of 1812. The rose currently grown in the United States under this name was, according to Léonie Bell, imported around 1954 from the Kordes Nursery in Germany by Richard Thompson, author of *Old Roses for Modern Gardens*.

I have grown this rose for a number of years and had no reason to suspect that it was not the true variety. In the meanwhile, I came to grow PANACHÉE DE LYON, a striped or parti-colored sport of ROSE DU ROI, introduced in 1895. This was presumably the last of several such sports of ROSE DU ROI. All were very unstable. This has also proved to be the case for the clone that I grow. Usually the blossoms are a rather bland rose pink that by a stretch of the imagination could be the “flowers salmon” of William Paul. Other times they are true to character and this same pink is interspersed with contrasting petals of a rich, smoky red. Occasionally a branch will revert completely to this dark, smoky red. Here we surely have the original ROSE DU ROI. Vintage Gardens has worked with this rose to obtain stable clones from which to produce plants for sale.

Now there is the question of the identity of the ROSE DU ROI imported by Richard Thompson. Could this be ROSE DU ROI À FLEURS POURPRES? If so, it is not a sport of the true ROSE DU ROI since they differ widely in prickles, foliage, receptacle, flower form, and flower size. We do know that the rose currently distributed as ROSE DU ROI À FLEURS POURPRES is truly a Hybrid Perpetual, probably in some way related to GÉNÉRAL JACQUEMINOT. It can also be determined that the ROSE DU ROI À FLEURS POURPRES that Mrs. Keays documented in her book *Old*

Roses is not this rose imported by Mr. Thompson. In the *American Rose Annual* of 1932, her description of the prickles is the most readily comparable point. Her rose had prickles both large and small, while the Kordes ROSE DU ROI is nearly completely thornless with smooth wood. For the time being it is best to let this rose remain the ROSE DU ROI (of Commerce).

CATHERINE GHISLAINE should also be mentioned here before we leave ROSE DU ROI. In *The Graham Stuart Thomas Rose Book*, Mr. Thomas places this rose among the Damasks; the good repeat bloom is even mentioned. It seems strange that the connection to the Damask Perpetuals was not noted and CATHERINE GHISLAINE grouped accordingly. Brent Dickerson in *The Old Rose Adventurer* places CATHERINE GHISLAINE (Emiliana, 1885) among the Hybrid Chinas. Thus the name is wrongly applied to our Damask Perpetual. This rose could be CELINA DUBOS (Dubos, 1849), a sport of ROSE DU ROI. Its color, a pale blush-, almost greyish-white, and general character certainly comply. Further observation should confirm or deny, given more time. At any rate, this surely belongs among the small group of confirmed Damask Perpetuals.

Another rose imported by Richard Thompson about 1950, this time from the Chedane-Guinoisseau nursery, is now in the trade as “FOUR SEASONS ROSE.” It is obviously related to our true ROSE DU ROI, but distinct in many characteristics

Rose de Rescht. Photo by Barbara Worl.





Indigo. Photo by Ron Robertson.

and not a sport of that rose. This has been variously attributed to QUATRE SAISONS D'ITALIE and ROYAL PERPETUAL. Too much uncertainty concerning these names, possible synonyms, and the descriptions available to me make it impossible for me to render an educated declaration at this time. For more information, I recommend reading Léonie Bell's article in *Heritage Roses: The Rose Letter*, November 1990. New to my gardens in recent years is INDIGO (Lafayette, circa 1830). Of a rich purple coloration, the flowers are rather loose, but the bush reblooms heavily all summer and fall. The receptacle is elongated and typical of the Damask Per-

petuals, and there is a hint of smoothness that suggests a possible connection with the Chinas, but everything else about the plant is strongly Gallica in character. It is like having Gallica roses all season. In contrast, another of the early members of this group, DUCHESSE DE ROHAN (Lévêque, 1847) is far more sparing of her later flowers. This was not an uncommon trait in many of these roses that were classed as Damask Perpetuals by the contemporary authors. There are surely roses of Damask Perpetual descent that are or were placed in the summer-flowering groups due to recalcitrant rebloom. Our DUCHESSE DE ROHAN also shows variation from the norm in her short receptacle, but seems to fit best with the Damask Perpetuals.

"ROSE DE RESCHT" is the name by which a rose from the early part of the 19th century was reintroduced in the middle of the 20th century. In spite of claims for ancient origins in Persia, it is obvious from the presence of this rose in historic plantings here in this country that this is a close relative of the Damask Perpetuals, which were developed to their fullest extent in France. This one differs considerably from those discussed above and could reasonably be considered an early Hybrid Perpetual. The large smooth leaves, smooth stems, and short receptacle all indicate this. I like to think of this rose as one of those seedlings of the Hybrid Bourbon ATHALIN that were of "Portland character." The current name should be



retained since there is little evidence to confirm an original 19th century name for this rose.

A series of roses introduced long after the Damask Perpetuals had been superseded by the Hybrid Perpetuals seems to fit well into my core group. These roses all appear to carry some influence from the China rose, but very muted. *MARBRÉE* (Moreau et Robert, 1858) and *DELAMBRE* (Moreau et Robert, 1863) both seem to be correctly named and true Damask Perpetuals. Unfortunately, *PERGOLÈSE* (Moreau et Robert, 1860), *COMTE DE CHAMBORD* (Moreau et Robert 1860),

MARIE ROBERT (Moreau et Robert, circa 1860?), *JACQUES CARTIER* (Moreau-Robert, 1868), and *REMBRANDT* (Moreau-Robert, 1883) all seem to be wrongly named. The false *PERGOLÈSE* is of typical Gallica persuasion and never reblooms. *MME. BOLL* (D. Boll/Boyau, 1859) is the correct name for *COMTE DE CHAMBORD* and should be classed as a Hybrid Perpetual. *DE LA GRIFFERAIE* (Vibert,



TOP: *Marchesa Boccella*. Photo by Barbara Worl.

ABOVE: *Marie de St. Jean*. Photo by Étienne Bouret.



ABOVE: Yolande d'Aragon. OPPOSITE: Reine des Violettes.
Photos by Barbara Worl.

1845) is the rather egregious imposter that I have received and seen in photographs that purports to be MARIE ROBERT. JACQUES CARTIER is likely the Hybrid Perpetual MARCHESA BOCCELLA (Desprez/Cochet, 1840), despite a rather faint protest from Graham Thomas. Our REMBRANDT is a Hybrid Perpetual and should be classed as such even if correctly identified. MARIE DE ST. JEAN (Damazin, 1869) appears to have been introduced a Hybrid Perpetual, but the present plant fits neatly into the Damask Perpetuals with but few allowances for some China influence.

This leads into our second group, the Trianon Perpetuals of Pierre Vibert. In the 1830s Vibert raised a series of seedlings from a rose he called ROSE DE TRIANON and some of its descendants. The origin of ROSE DE TRIANON is rather obscure. The quotes in Brent Dickerson's *The Old Rose Advisor*, while fas-

cinating, are more intriguing for what information is missing than what is included. What does seem very clear is that these descendants of TRIANON were very variable and that Vibert considered them a new kind of Perpetual. At the time many of them were introduced, Laffay's Hybrid Perpetuals were bursting onto the scene. In general these Trianon Perpetuals were a similar, but parallel, development. In his first edition of *The Rose Garden* of 1848, William Paul listed them separately both from the Damask Perpetuals (although associated with them) and the Hybrid Perpetuals. In subsequent editions they were absorbed into the Hybrid Perpetuals where they truly belong as the real Damask Perpetuals became eclipsed.

Few of these TRIANON Hybrid Perpetuals remain. Starting with the exception that proves the rule, BLANCHE-VIBERT of 1847 shows how variable these roses

were. Its characteristics place it clearly with the Damask Perpetuals; there is little obvious China rose influence. The following, in contrast, show strong evidence of China rose influence. SYDONIE, also of 1847, has come down to us correctly named and seems to represent the general style of the pink roses of this group. “GLENDDORA” is a found rose that is clearly closely related to SYDONIE and is surely one of Vibert’s roses. It has been identified by one modern rosarian as Vibert’s JOASINE HANET, but I don’t believe that that can be clearly determined from the scant historical evidence. They both make graceful shrubs, becoming bushy and taller than most of the Damask Perpetuals I grow. A very large, coarse plant and flower relative to SYDONIE are produced by YOLANDE D’ARAGON



(1843). I find this less likely as a candidate for one of the TRIANON group, but perhaps this just shows how variable they truly were. Although not directly an introduction by Vibert, REINE DES VIOLETTES (Milet-Malet, 1860) appears to be connected through its sport parent PIE IX (Vibert, 1848).

My third group consists of roses that some recent cataloguers have tried to force into the Damask Perpetual group, although they were classed elsewhere at their introduction. Most of them are Hybrid Perpetuals. BARONNE PREVOST is the head of a family of Hybrid Perpetuals. Some members of this family that sometimes are listed as Damask Perpetuals include CAROLINE DE SANSAL, MME. BOLL (also sent out incorrectly as MME. KNORR, which does not seem to be available), MIRANDA, and MARCHESA BOCCCELLA. ARTHUR DE SANSAL is a Hybrid Perpetual affiliated with GÉANT DES BATAILLES and differs markedly from my core group in



Cardinal Richelieu. Photo by Barbara Worl.

its China affinities. A sport of the important Hybrid Perpetual BARONNE ADOLPHE DE ROTHSCHILD (aka BARONESS ROTHSCHILD), is MABEL MORRISON. This rose is very far removed from the Damask Perpetuals. Showing one character not uncommon in the Hybrid Perpetuals, the so-called “high-shouldered” effect of the flower nestling in the leaves, does not make this a Damask Perpetual.

The SULTANE FAVORITE listed by Graham Thomas under both the Gallicas and Portland Damasks is clearly not a member of either group, but a Hybrid China. With its small leaves and nearly climbing habit, it does not resemble either group. SOUVENIR DE MCKINLEY (Godard, 1902) is sometimes placed among the Damask Perpetuals. The current rose of this name is very like MARCHESA BOCCCELLA, but seems larger in leaf, somewhat darker in color, and different in flower form in the opening stages. This requires more careful observation. It seems unlikely to be correctly named, judging by the stated parentage of MAGNA CARTA (HP) × CAPTAIN CHRISTY (HT), but descriptions are scant.

It should now be apparent that the Damask Perpetuals still fairly widely available today are very few. As with every other class of Old European roses, many varieties that are today grouped together were not so grouped in the past. But even among 19th century writers there was much disagreement. It all depends on how an individual sees the divisions between the groups. For example, CARDINAL DE RICHELIEU to one observer is a Gallica, but to another is a Hybrid China. I believe that the evidence of strong China influence should be recognized. Those roses with evidence of China characteristics should be grouped separately from the roses that have a long history in Europe and the Middle East. The introduction of the roses from the Orient into the breeding lines of European roses was the most crucial change that occurred in that revolutionary era of rose breeding. To ignore the intermediates and other early examples of these crosses by grouping them with the old groups is to deny history and make it less clear to rose students today. The paucity of detailed information already contributes to this nebulous understanding. Even so, the contemporary catalogue and book authors near the introduction of these roses remain basic guides to understanding the classes as they developed.

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Phillip Robinson and Tyccho in their Sebastopol garden.
Photo by Gregg Lowery.